

# STOP-LOSS

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commanders could consider when making their stop-loss waiver decisions.

Besides the list, MAJCOM commanders have been given broad latitude to decide who is needed for the current or expected missions.

"These things fall into gray areas," Maloney said. "How badly do you need them? How badly have they been hurt by stop-loss?"

Technically, the personnel center could overrule the MAJCOM, but that is extremely unlikely except for cases where someone has an administrative problem, such as an unfulfilled active-duty commitment, Maloney said.

"We don't want to find ourselves in a position to override a MAJCOM commander," he said. "We're here to support them."

Although the number of waiver requests has been relatively constant, personnel officials have no way of telling how many more requests may be pending.

"There could be 50 in the pipe right now, there could be 50 upstairs on the fax machine," Maloney said. MAJCOM commanders "are making very important decisions, and I don't think there's a need to rush these through without a lot of thought."

For example, Pacific Air Forces' commander Gen. William Begert has approved nine waiver requests and disapproved three. But personnel officials say another 22 requests still are pending, either somewhere in the system or awaiting Begert's decision.

"He says that when each waiver comes to him, he looks at each carefully to make sure we maintain the right skill set to meet the impending mission," said PACAF spokeswoman Senior Master Sgt. Darla Ernst.

But some airmen question the way stop-loss is being managed.

## Is it fair to let generals leave?

Colonels with 30 years and lieutenant colonels with 28 years normally would face mandatory retirement and still do. They are exempt from stop-loss.

But enlisted airmen who would normally face the equivalent mandatory retirement or separation for exceeding the high year of tenure for their rank are included under stop-loss and must remain in uniform until it is lifted, unless they get a waiver.

And general officers don't fall under stop-loss. The program applies only to colonels and below.



Is it fair for general officers to be exempt from stop-loss? Generals who are scheduled to retire soon are, clockwise from top left, Maj. Gen. Larry Northington, Maj. Gen. Paul Weaver, Gen. Charles T. "Tony" Robertson and Lt. Gen. Maxwell C. Bailey.

Four generals, including former Chief of Staff Gen. Michael Ryan, either retired or started terminal leave Oct. 1, the day before stop-loss took effect. The policy was announced Sept. 22.

Since Oct. 1, two more general officers have started terminal leave: Gen. Charles T. "Tony" Robertson, former commander of Air Mobility Command and commander in chief of U.S. Transportation Command, and Maj. Gen. Paul Weaver, director of the Air National Guard. Others scheduled to retire soon include Lt. Gen. Maxwell C. Bailey, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, and Maj. Gen. Larry Northington, deputy assistant secretary for strategic planning.

Bailey's change of command was pushed back from Dec. 2 to Jan. 16. Air Force officials did not know whether the extension was Bailey's choice.

A senior Air Force official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said officials "never really considered general officers in the same context as airmen" when implementing stop-loss.

By law, the Air Force is allowed to have no more than 282 general officers, 141 of whom must be brigadier generals. That number includes the 70 to 75 who at any time are serving in joint-service tours.

That cap is part of the problem, the senior official said. Another is that replacing a general is a long process, with the re-

placement in most cases named months before actually taking the job. Keeping a general in place would mean not letting his replacement move up and not opening a position for a colonel to get his first star.

But the law that permits stop-loss also allows exceeding the rank caps. The Air Force already has said it will do just that to ensure new chief master sergeants can assume the rank when the promotion list takes effect in January.

Exceeding rank caps would mean finding jobs for generals kept under stop-loss, the official said.

"You ask yourself, 'Do you just keep general officers on board to keep them around?' And I think the answer is, 'There's no reason to.'"

The Air Guard's Weaver agreed, saying it was very difficult to "send kids off to war" while retiring himself. But he had made the decision to get out long before the war and said his replacement, Maj. Gen. Daniel James III, has earned the job.

James' nomination has not been confirmed by the Senate.

"The best thing I can do is step aside," Weaver said. "If you stop it at the top, you stop it at the bottom."

"In a full mobilization in a war where our absolute security was at stake, you would probably find waivers to the law ... where everybody's expertise would be retained."

## MOST CRITICAL

To help them make decisions on stop-loss waivers, some commanders asked for a list of the Air Force's "most critical and stressed" Air Force specialty codes, personnel officials say. This is the list they were provided. It is based on known requirements and available personnel:

**Support officers**  
31PX Security forces  
32EX Civil engineers  
34MX Services  
21LX Logistics, lt. col. and below  
21GX Logistics plans  
**Rated officers**  
11RXJ U-2 pilot  
11RXD HC-130 pilot  
13BX Air battle manager  
11SXX Special ops pilot  
12SXX Special ops navigator  
**Enlisted**  
1AXXX Aircrew operations  
1CXXX Command, control system ops  
2AXXX Manned aerospace maintenance  
3PXXX Security forces  
1NXXX Intelligence  
2EXXX Comm-computer systems  
4XXXX Medical  
**Chief master sergeants**  
1AXXX Career enlisted aviators  
1C100 Air traffic control  
1C400 Tactical air command and control  
1T000 Survival, evasion, resistance and escape operations  
2F000 Fuels distribution management

waiver was disapproved because I'm in a critical AFSC. Even though I can't do the job, my functional manager said the AFSC is manned at only 50 percent and he won't let me go."

Williams' injuries are the result of years of playing tackle football for the base team in Germany and an auto accident in 1997. He no longer can fly or even sit at a desk all day and is receiving injections to numb the pain. He planned to retire in March with 20 years of service. He is now considering seeking a medical discharge.

A pilot asked that he not be identified because he was already threatened with a bad assignment when he requested a stop-loss waiver. But he said he probably will lose the civilian job he had lined up for his retirement and isn't even involved in any operations supporting either Enduring Freedom or Noble Eagle.

"It would be different if they really needed me," he said. "But they don't. I'm seeing others approved to get out. This is a slap in the face to someone who has dedicated so much of his life to this country."

## Family concerns

In a letter to Air Force Times, Kathleen Unwin, an Air Force spouse at Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark., said she was "insulted" by a statement from Air Force leaders that they were continuing stop-loss into January to "give our personnel some stability over the November/December holiday period."

Attempts to reach Unwin by phone were unsuccessful.

"It adds undue stress to those trying to separate," Unwin wrote. "We don't know if we can move in two months or two years now. This affects the service members' ability to make informed decisions about job opportunities. It affects the members' spouses' job opportunities [and] relocation issues such as buying a home."

Personnel officials said they understand such concerns and are continuing to analyze manning needs, with a goal of beginning to release some AFSCs from stop-loss, possibly as early as the end of January.

And they already are planning for the day stop-loss is lifted, trying to ensure what Maloney called "an orderly departure."

Officials also are backing a provision in this year's defense authorization bill that would mandate a 90-day transition period once stop-loss ends.

"There is going to come a point where you have to phase down," he said. "The concept is to allow maximum flexibility" to departing airmen to ease their transition. □

Staff Writer David Castellon contributed to this report.

But that answer falls short for some airmen who question the example that it sets.

## Ready to go, forced to stay

The initial calculation was that stop-loss could affect about 11,500 officers and enlisted who were scheduled to retire or separate before April 30.

The number has been steadily shrinking, the personnel center's Maloney said, as officials identify those exempted, those who have withdrawn their retirement paperwork and those who have re-enlisted. He was not able to give a solid figure for how many still fall under stop-loss.

Only the Air Force has implemented a blanket stop-loss. The Navy has a limited policy affecting about 10,500 sailors and officers in 11 specialties. The Marine Corps has put a limited stop-loss policy into effect that keeps approximately 560 Marines — infantrymen and nuclear, biological and chemical specialists — on active duty for six months. The Army hasn't implemented stop-loss.

And that's OK with Tech. Sgt. Ronald Williams, an intelligence operations specialist at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz.

But seeing generals leave doesn't sit well with Williams, whose stop-loss waiver was denied.

"I am physically unable to do my job and have been grounded because of a herniated disk in my back," he said. "I'm told my